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CANADA

THE MASK™

THE ORIGIN OF MR GONE

image COMICS PRESENTS:

THE MAXX™

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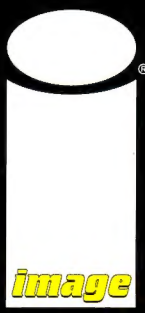
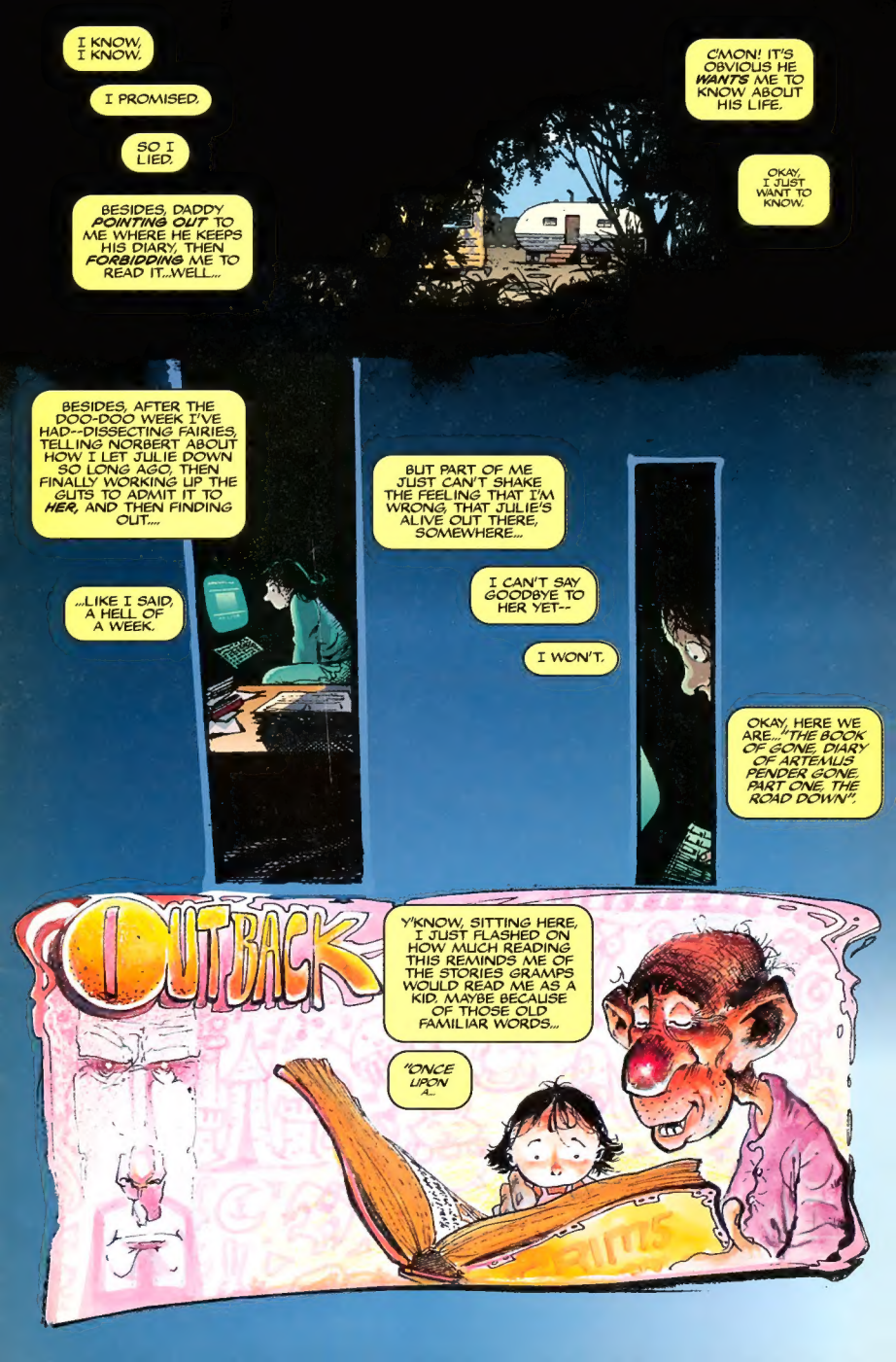
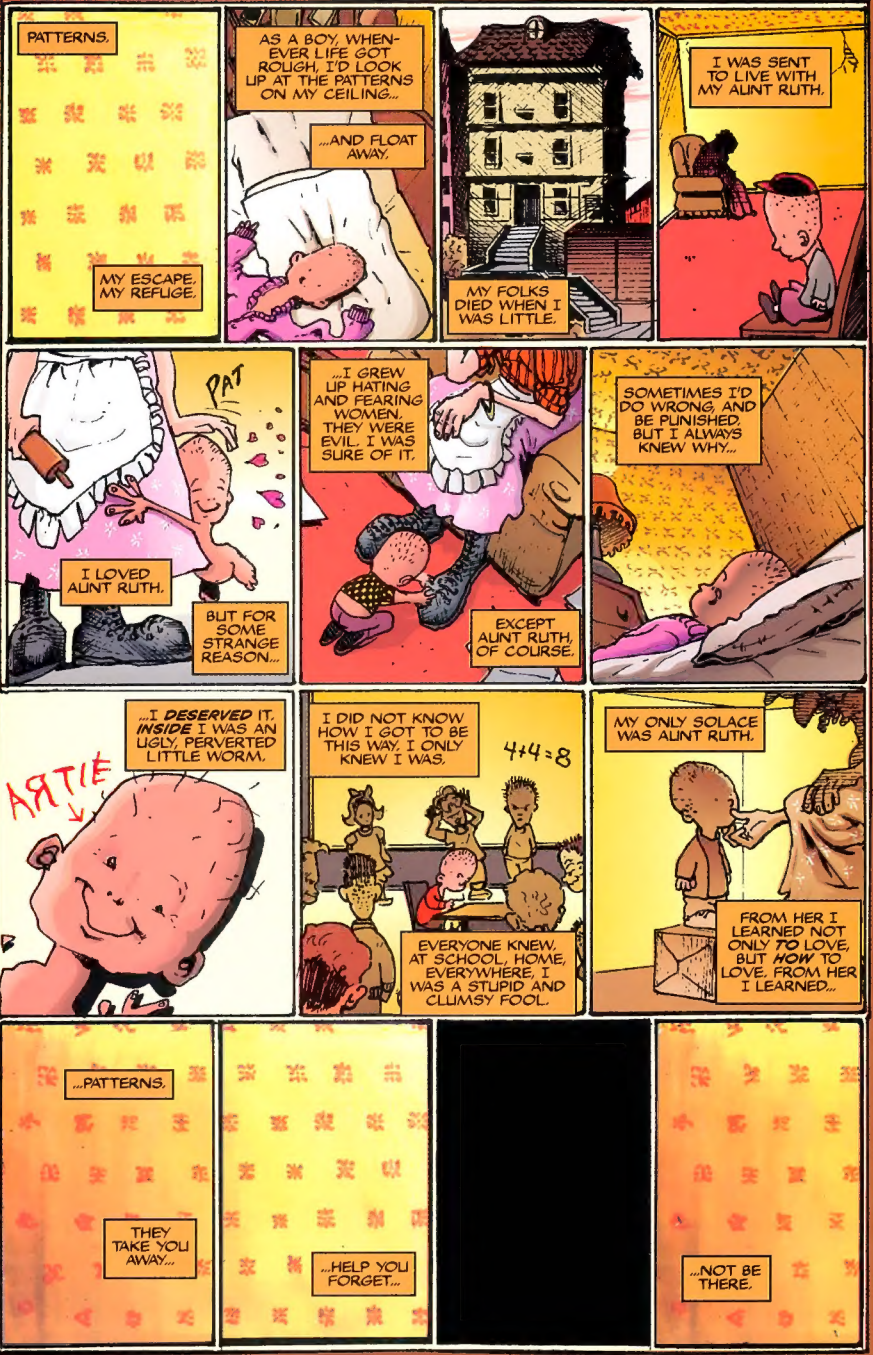
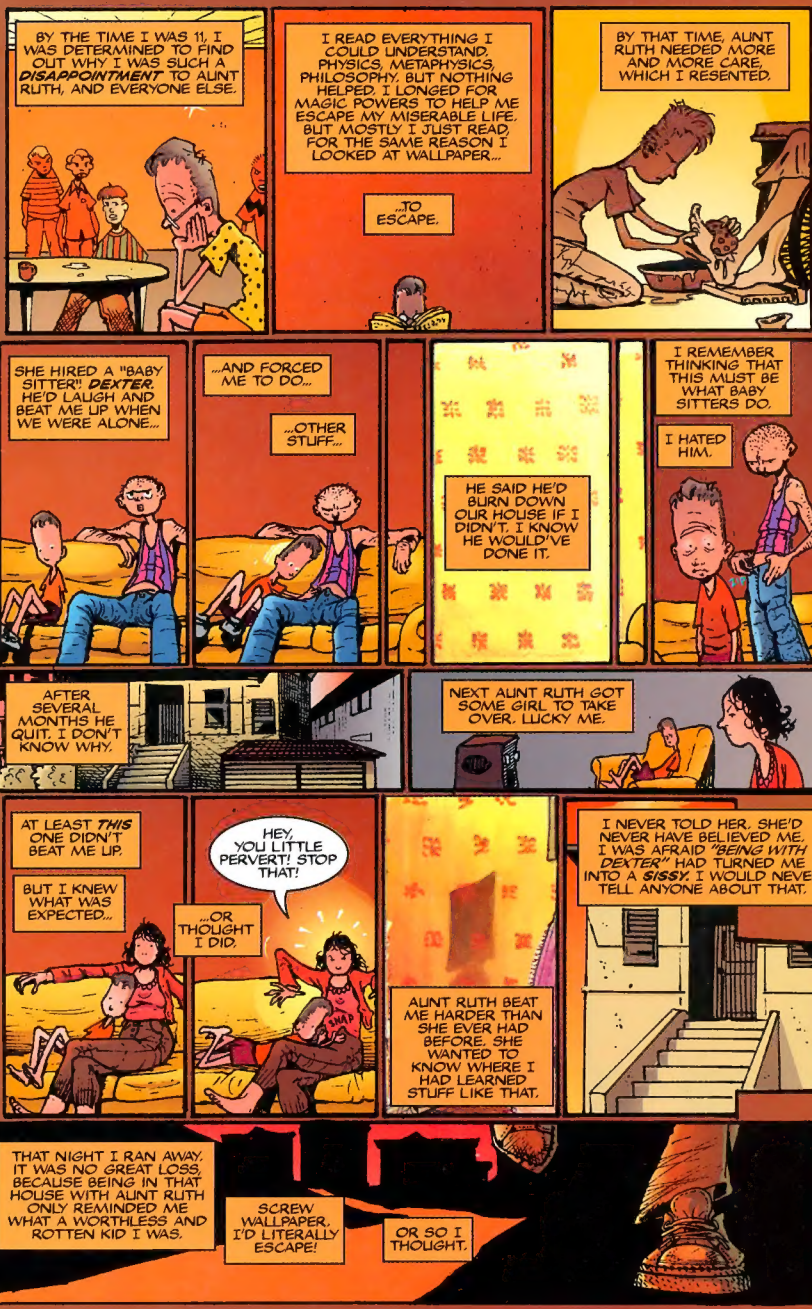
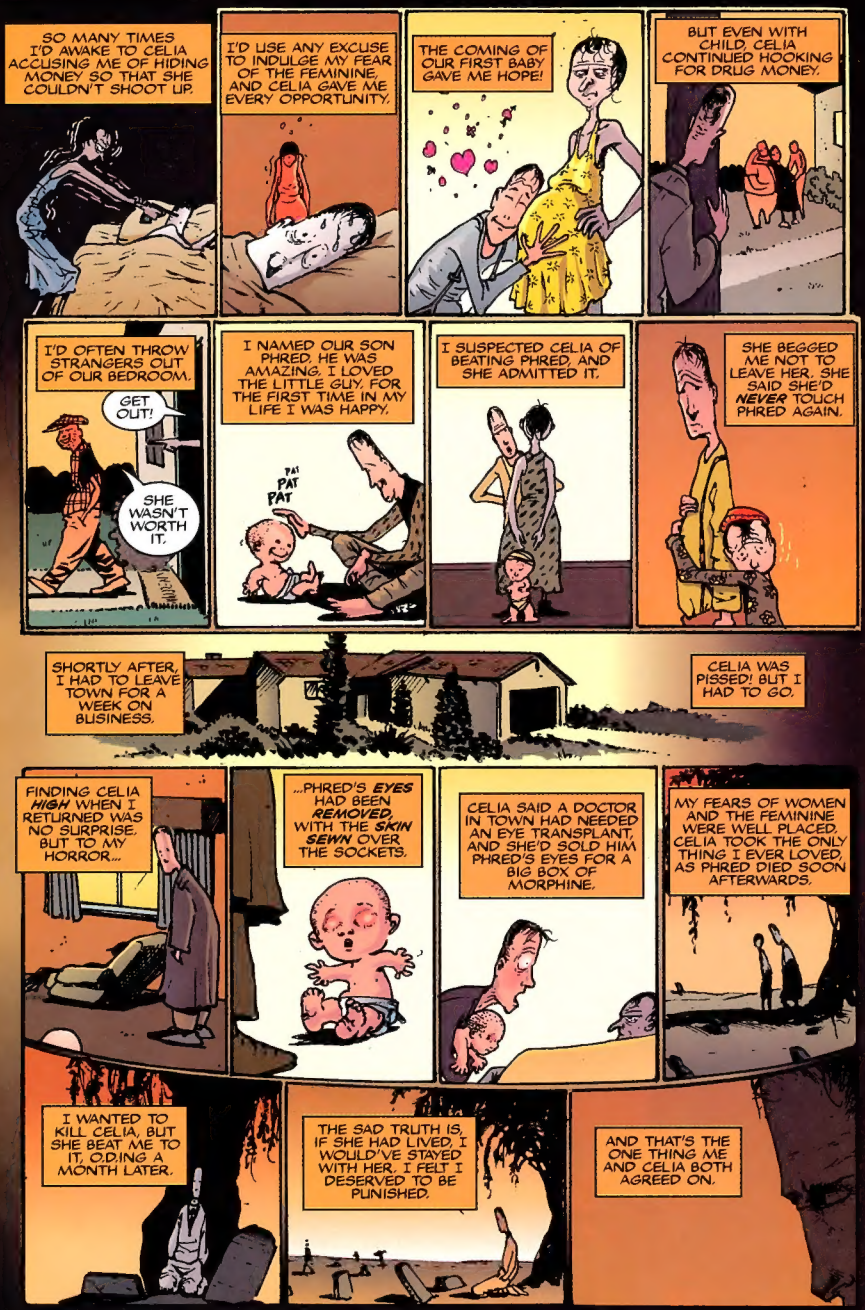


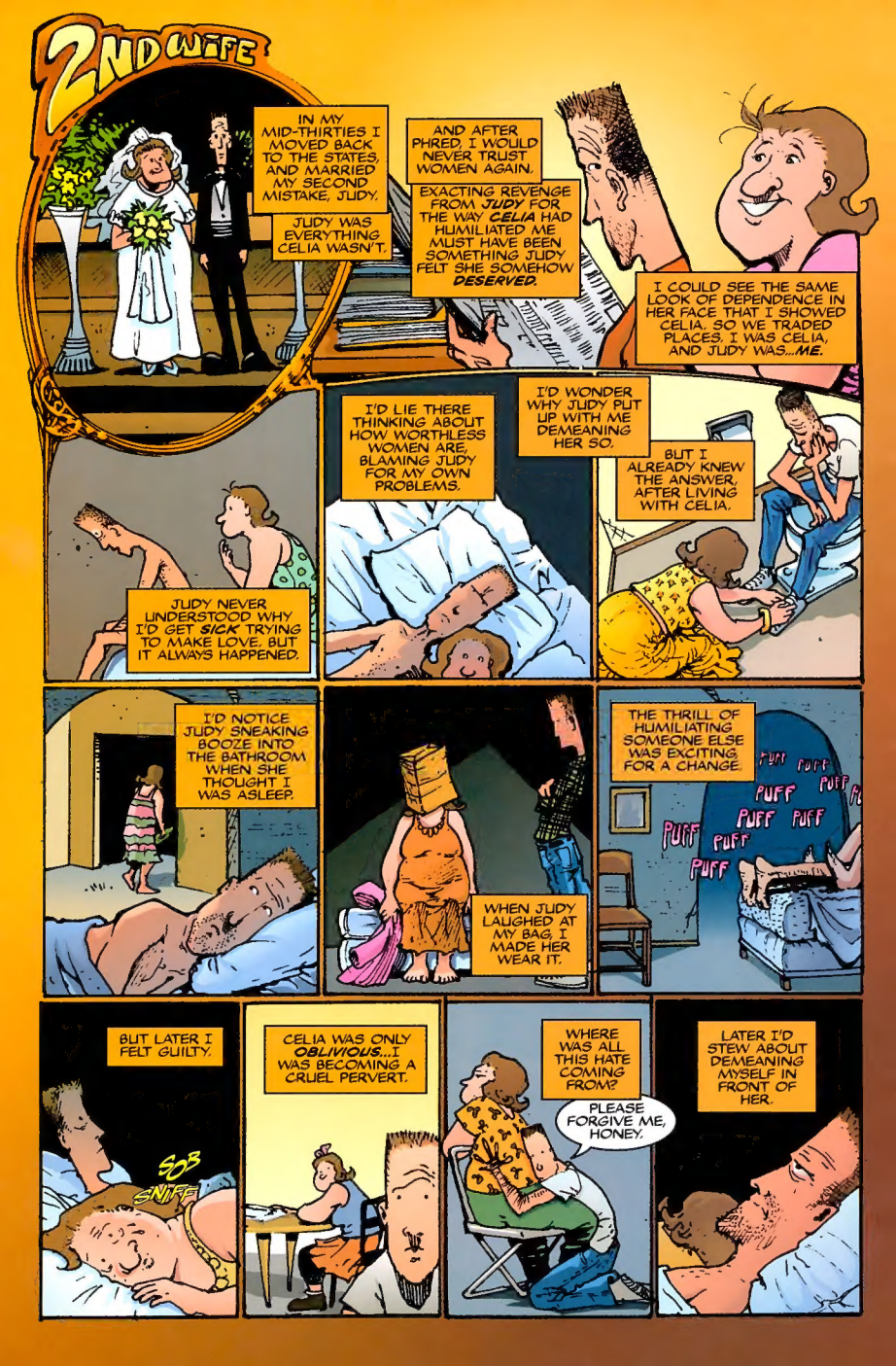

I KNOW, I KNOW.
I PROMISED.
SO I LIED.
BESIDES, DADDY POINTING OUT TO ME WHERE HE KEEPS HIS DIARY, THEN FORBIDDING ME TO READ IT...WELL...
C'MON! IT'S OBVIOUS HE WANTS ME TO KNOW ABOUT HIS LIFE.
OKAY, I JUST WANT TO KNOW.
BESIDES, AFTER THE DOO-DOO WEEK I'VE HAD--DISSECTING FAIRIES, TELLING NORBERT ABOUT HOW I LET JULIE DOWN SO LONG AGO, THEN FINALLY WORKING UP THE GUTS TO ADMIT IT TO HER, AND THEN FINDING OUT....
...LIKE I SAID, A HELL OF A WEEK.
BUT PART OF ME JUST CAN'T SHAKE THE FEELING THAT I'M WRONG, THAT JULIE'S ALIVE OUT THERE, SOMEWHERE...
I CAN'T SAY GOODBYE TO HER YET--
I WON'T.
OKAY, HERE WE ARE... "THE BOOK OF GONE, DIARY OF ARTEMUS PENDER GONE, PART ONE, THE ROAD DOWN".
OUTBACK
Y'KNOW, SITTING HERE, I JUST FLASHED ON HOW MUCH READING THIS REMINDS ME OF THE STORIES GRAMPS WOULD READ ME AS A KID. MAYBE BECAUSE OF THOSE OLD FAMILIAR WORDS...
"ONCE UPON A...

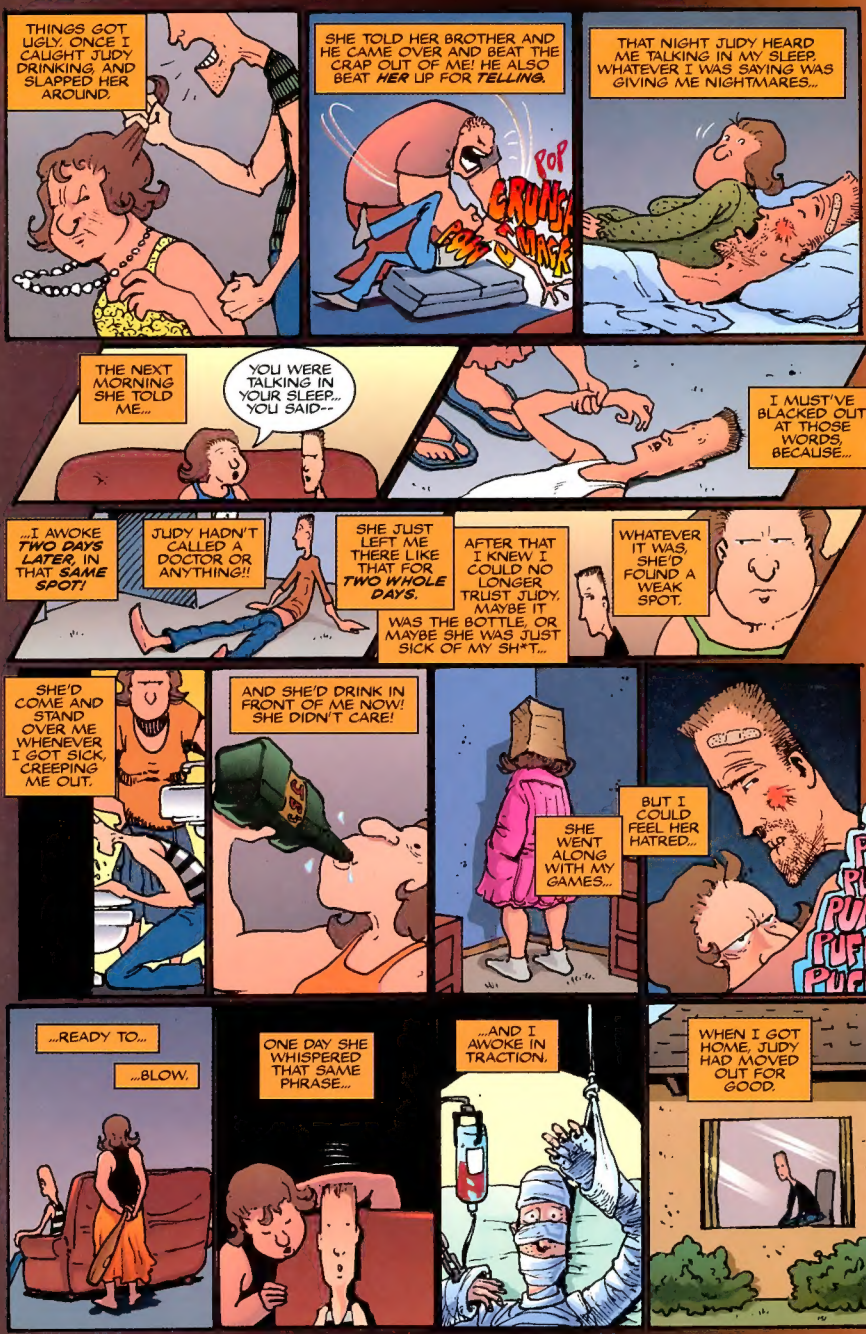

PATTERNS.
MY ESCAPE, MY REFUGE.
AS A BOY, WHENEVER LIFE GOT ROUGH, I'D LOOK UP AT THE PATTERNS ON MY CEILING...
...AND FLOAT AWAY.
MY FOLKS DIED WHEN I WAS LITTLE.
I WAS SENT TO LIVE WITH MY AUNT RUTH.
PAT
I LOVED AUNT RUTH.
BUT FOR SOME STRANGE REASON...
...I GREW UP HATING AND FEARING WOMEN. THEY WERE EVIL. I WAS SURE OF IT.
EXCEPT AUNT RUTH, OF COURSE.
SOMETIMES I'D DO WRONG, AND BE PUNISHED, BUT I ALWAYS KNEW WHY...
ARTIE
...I DESERVED IT. INSIDE I WAS AN UGLY, PERVERTED LITTLE WORM.
I DID NOT KNOW HOW I GOT TO BE THIS WAY, I ONLY KNEW I WAS.
4+4=8
EVERYONE KNEW. AT SCHOOL, HOME, EVERYWHERE, I WAS A STUPID AND CLUMSY FOOL.
MY ONLY SOLACE WAS AUNT RUTH.
FROM HER I LEARNED NOT ONLY TO LOVE, BUT HOW TO LOVE. FROM HER I LEARNED...
...PATTERNS.
THEY TAKE YOU AWAY...
...HELP YOU FORGET...
...NOT BE THERE.

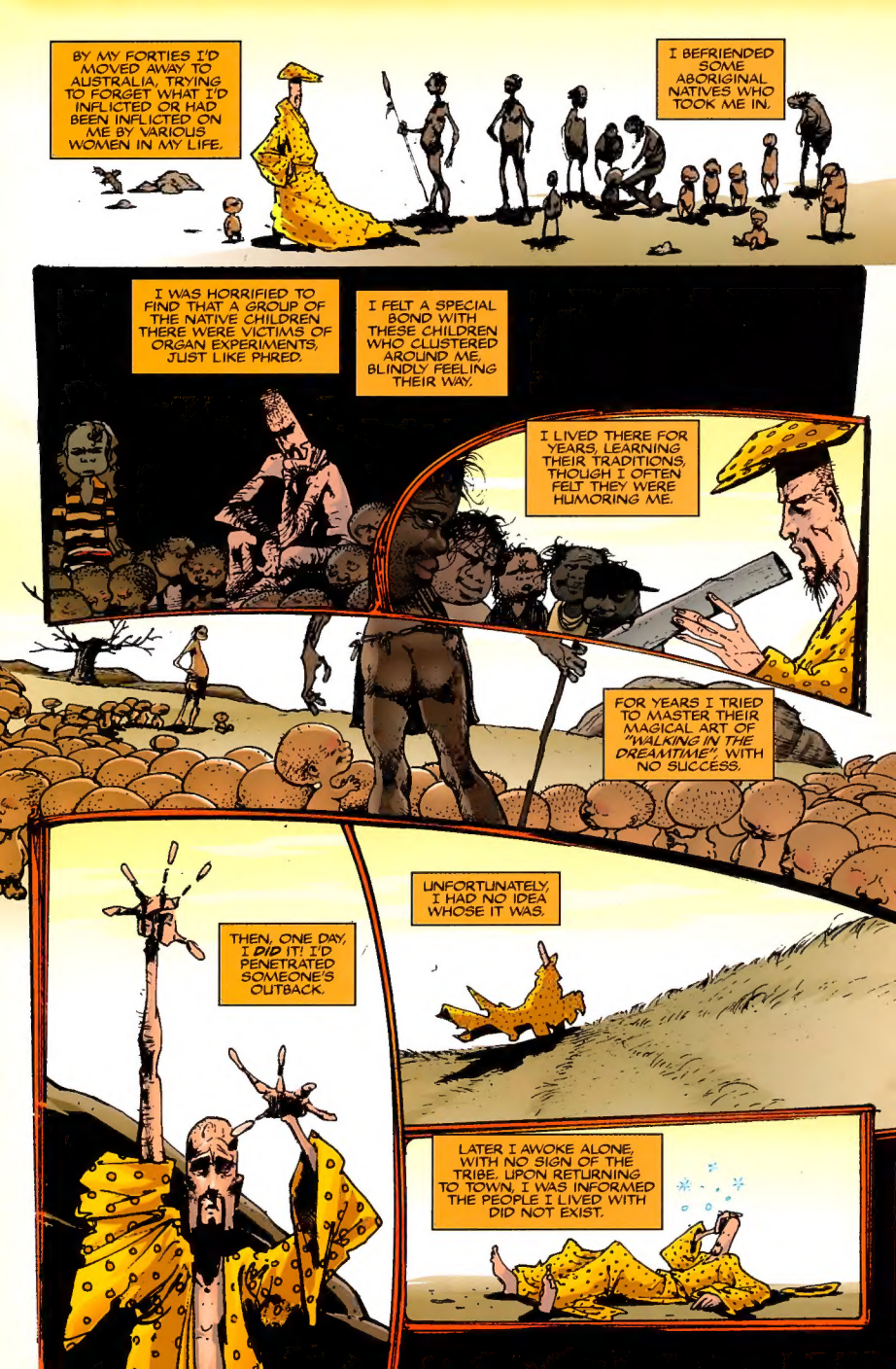

BY THE TIME I WAS 11, I WAS DETERMINED TO FIND OUT WHY I WAS SUCH A DISAPPOINTMENT TO AUNT RUTH, AND EVERYONE ELSE.
I READ EVERYTHING I COULD UNDERSTAND. PHYSICS, METAPHYSICS, PHILOSOPHY. BUT NOTHING HELPED. I LONGED FOR MAGIC POWERS TO HELP ME ESCAPE MY MISERABLE LIFE. BUT MOSTLY I JUST READ, FOR THE SAME REASON I LOOKED AT WALLPAPER...
...TO ESCAPE.
BY THAT TIME, AUNT RUTH NEEDED MORE AND MORE CARE, WHICH I RESENTED.
SHE HIRED A "BABY SITTER" DEXTER. HE'D LAUGH AND BEAT ME UP WHEN WE WERE ALONE...
...AND FORCED ME TO DO...
...OTHER STUFF...
HE SAID HE'D BURN DOWN OUR HOUSE IF I DIDN'T. I KNOW HE WOULD'VE DONE IT.
I REMEMBER THINKING THAT THIS MUST BE WHAT BABY SITTERS DO.
I HATED HIM.
AFTER SEVERAL MONTHS HE QUIT. I DON'T KNOW WHY.
NEXT AUNT RUTH GOT SOME GIRL TO TAKE OVER. LUCKY ME.
AT LEAST THIS ONE DIDN'T BEAT ME UP.
BUT I KNEW WHAT WAS EXPECTED...
HEY, YOU LITTLE PERVERT! STOP THAT!
...OR THOUGHT I DID.
SNAP
AUNT RUTH BEAT ME HARDER THAN SHE EVER HAD BEFORE. SHE WANTED TO KNOW WHERE I HAD LEARNED STUFF LIKE THAT.
I NEVER TOLD HER. SHE'D NEVER HAVE BELIEVED ME. I WAS AFRAID "BEING WITH DEXTER" HAD TURNED ME INTO A SISSY. I WOULD NEVER TELL ANYONE ABOUT THAT.
THAT NIGHT I RAN AWAY. IT WAS NO GREAT LOSS, BECAUSE BEING IN THAT HOUSE WITH AUNT RUTH ONLY REMINDED ME WHAT A WORTHLESS AND ROTTEN KID I WAS.
SCREW WALLPAPER. I'D LITERALLY ESCAPE!
OR SO I THOUGHT.

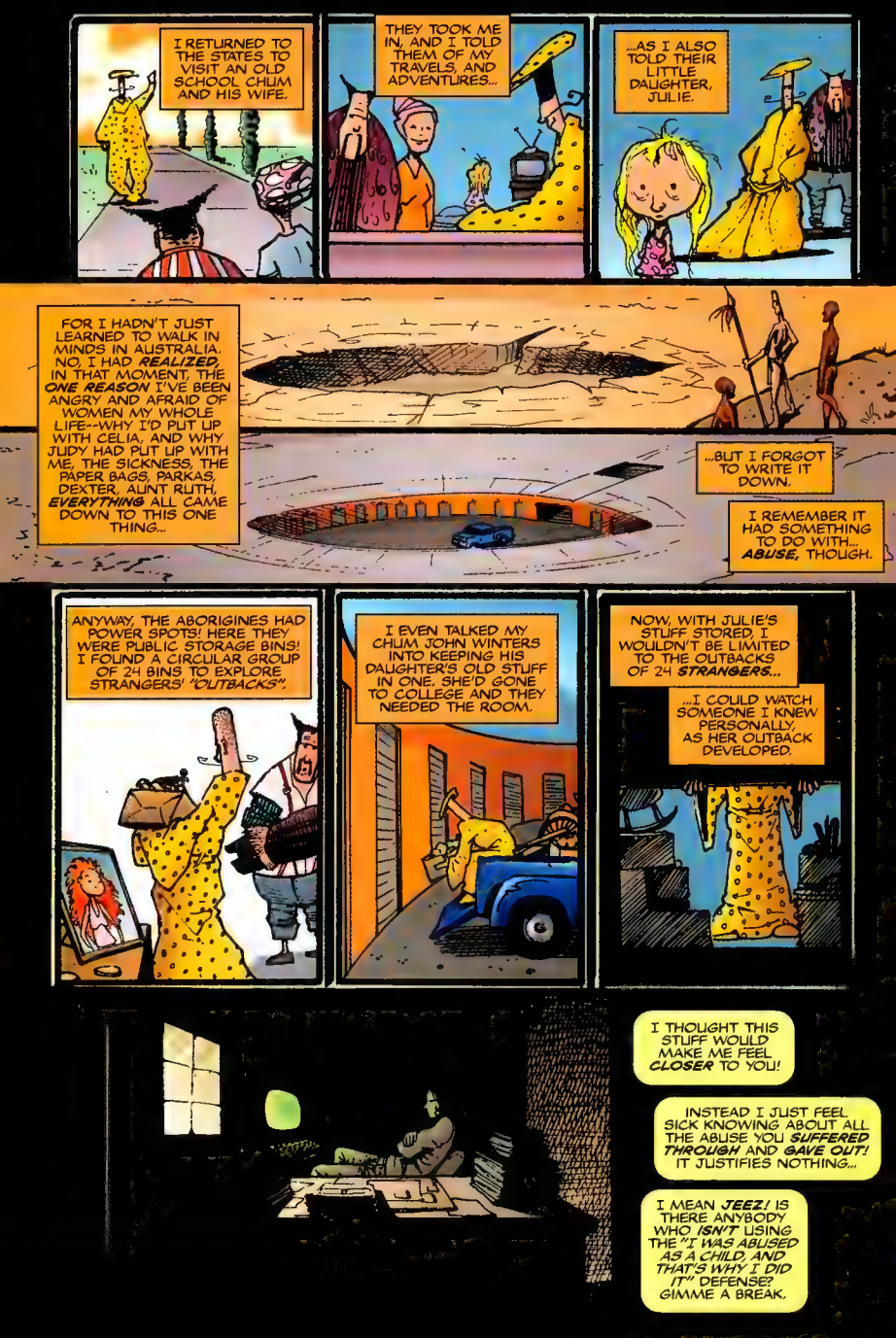
1ST WIFE
IN MY TWENTIES I MOVED TO BORA BORA, WHERE I MET MY FIRST MISTAKE, CELIA. SHE SWORE THAT IF I MARRIED HER, SHE'D GIVE UP HOOKING AND HEROIN --WHICH SHE INSTANTLY RENEGED ON, WHICH IS WHY I MARRIED HER, OF COURSE.
IT WAS ABOUT THIS TIME THAT I SET OUT TO LEARN WHY WOMEN SCARED AND ANGERED ME SO. IT WAS PUZZLING, ASIDE FROM THE OCCASIONAL PUNISHMENT, MY AUNT HAD SHOWN ME NOTHING BUT LOVE.
I DIDN'T GET IT. WHERE DID IT COME FROM, THIS FEAR OF THE FEMININE? AND WHY WERE CELIA'S WORST QUALITIES THOSE THAT KEPT ME WITH HER?
META PHYSICS
I OFTEN CAME HOME...
...TO FIND HER STRUNG OUT. WHEN SHE AWOKE...
...I'D BE BLAMED.
SHE'D YELL AND SCREAM, THEN APOLOGIZE AFTERWARDS.
THEN I'D FEEL SECRETLY SUPERIOR.
AND THEN, EVENTUALLY, I'D FEEL SORRY FOR HER...
...AND THEN I'D "HELP" HER.
A JUNKIE'S RARELY IN THE MOOD, AND I GOT PHYSICALLY ILL AT THE THOUGHT OF NORMAL RELATIONS. I DON'T KNOW WHY.
I'D DEVELOPED A FETISH OF WEARING A PARKA AND BAG OVER MY HEAD. I SHARED IT WITH CELIA ONCE...
WHAT'RE YOU, JOKING?! WHAT AN IDIOT YOU LOOK LIKE! TAKE IT OFF!
AFTER THAT WE DID IT "NORMALLY" BUT I WASN'T THERE.
I FELT NAUSEA.

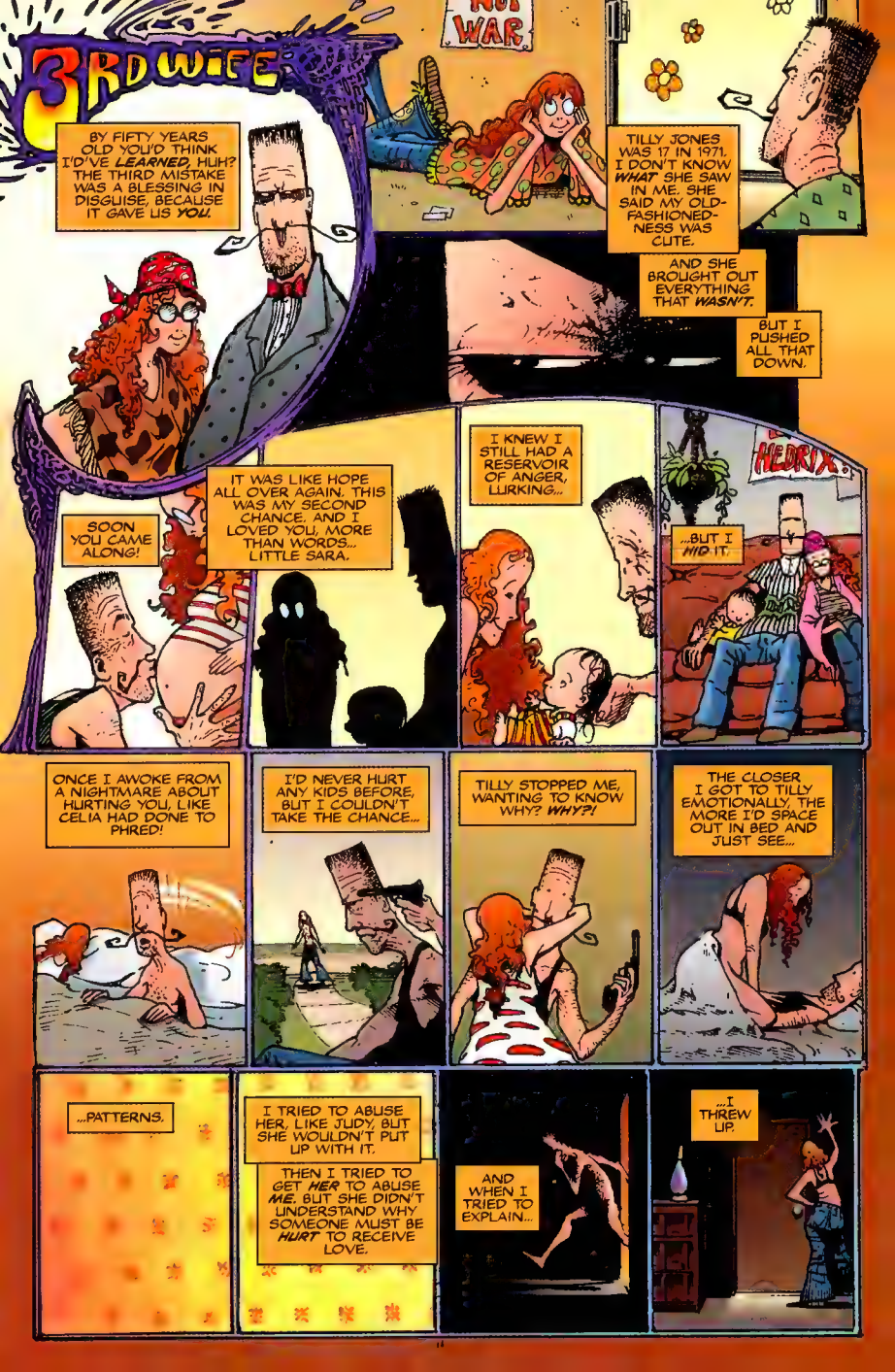

SO MANY TIMES I'D AWAKE TO CELIA ACCUSING ME OF HIDING MONEY SO THAT SHE COULDN'T SHOOT UP.
I'D USE ANY EXCUSE TO INDULGE MY FEAR OF THE FEMININE, AND CELIA GAVE ME EVERY OPPORTUNITY.
THE COMING OF OUR FIRST BABY GAVE ME HOPE!
BUT EVEN WITH CHILD, CELIA CONTINUED HOOKING FOR DRUG MONEY.
I'D OFTEN THROW STRANGERS OUT OF OUR BEDROOM.
GET OUT!
SHE WASN'T WORTH IT.
I NAMED OUR SON PHRED. HE WAS AMAZING. I LOVED THE LITTLE GUY. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE I WAS HAPPY.
PAT PAT
I SUSPECTED CELIA OF BEATING PHRED, AND SHE ADMITTED IT.
SHE BEGGED ME NOT TO LEAVE HER. SHE SAID SHE'D NEVER TOUCH PHRED AGAIN.
SHORTLY AFTER, I HAD TO LEAVE TOWN FOR A WEEK ON BUSINESS.
CELIA WAS PISSED! BUT I HAD TO GO.
FINDING CELIA HIGH WHEN I RETURNED WAS NO SURPRISE. BUT TO MY HORROR...
...PHRED'S EYES HAD BEEN REMOVED, WITH THE SKIN SEWN OVER THE SOCKETS.
CELIA SAID A DOCTOR IN TOWN HAD NEEDED AN EYE TRANSPLANT, AND SHE'D SOLD HIM PHRED'S EYES FOR A BIG BOX OF MORPHINE.
MY FEARS OF WOMEN AND THE FEMININE WERE WELL PLACED. CELIA TOOK THE ONLY THING I EVER LOVED, AS PHRED DIED SOON AFTERWARDS.
I WANTED TO KILL CELIA, BUT SHE BEAT ME TO IT, O.D.ING A MONTH LATER.
THE SAD TRUTH IS, IF SHE HAD LIVED, I WOULD'VE STAYED WITH HER. I FELT I DESERVED TO BE PUNISHED.
AND THAT'S THE ONE THING ME AND CELIA BOTH AGREED ON.

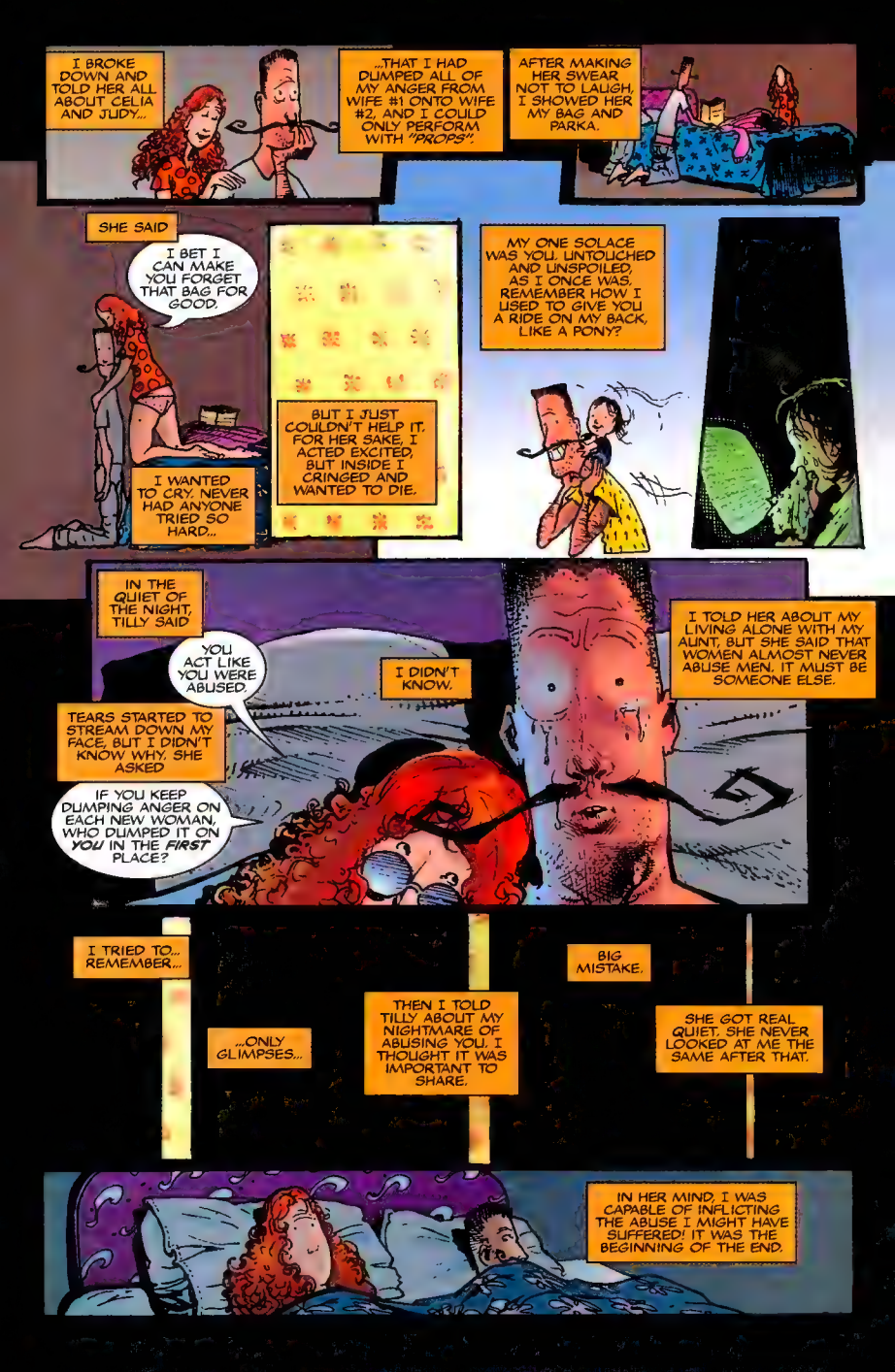

2ND WIFE
IN MY MID-THIRTIES I MOVED BACK TO THE STATES, AND MARRIED MY SECOND MISTAKE, JUDY.
JUDY WAS EVERYTHING CELIA WASN'T.
AND AFTER PHRED, I WOULD NEVER TRUST WOMEN AGAIN.
EXACTING REVENGE FROM JUDY FOR THE WAY CELIA HAD HUMILIATED ME MUST HAVE BEEN SOMETHING JUDY FELT SHE SOMEHOW DESERVED.
I COULD SEE THE SAME LOOK OF DEPENDENCE IN HER FACE THAT I SHOWED CELIA. SO WE TRADED PLACES. I WAS CELIA, AND JUDY WAS...ME.
JUDY NEVER UNDERSTOOD WHY I'D GET SICK TRYING TO MAKE LOVE. BUT IT ALWAYS HAPPENED.
I'D LIE THERE THINKING ABOUT HOW WORTHLESS WOMEN ARE, BLAMING JUDY FOR MY OWN PROBLEMS.
I'D WONDER WHY JUDY PUT UP WITH ME DEMEANING HER SO.
BUT I ALREADY KNEW THE ANSWER, AFTER LIVING WITH CELIA.
I'D NOTICE JUDY SNEAKING BOOZE INTO THE BATHROOM WHEN SHE THOUGHT I WAS ASLEEP.
WHEN JUDY LAUGHED AT MY BAG, I MADE HER WEAR IT.
THE THRILL OF HUMILIATING SOMEONE ELSE WAS EXCITING, FOR A CHANGE.
PUFF
BUT LATER I FELT GUILTY.
SOB
SNIFF
CELIA WAS ONLY OBLIVIOUS...I WAS BECOMING A CRUEL PERVERT.
WHERE WAS ALL THIS HATE COMING FROM?
PLEASE FORGIVE ME, HONEY.
LATER I'D STEW ABOUT DEMEANING MYSELF IN FRONT OF HER.

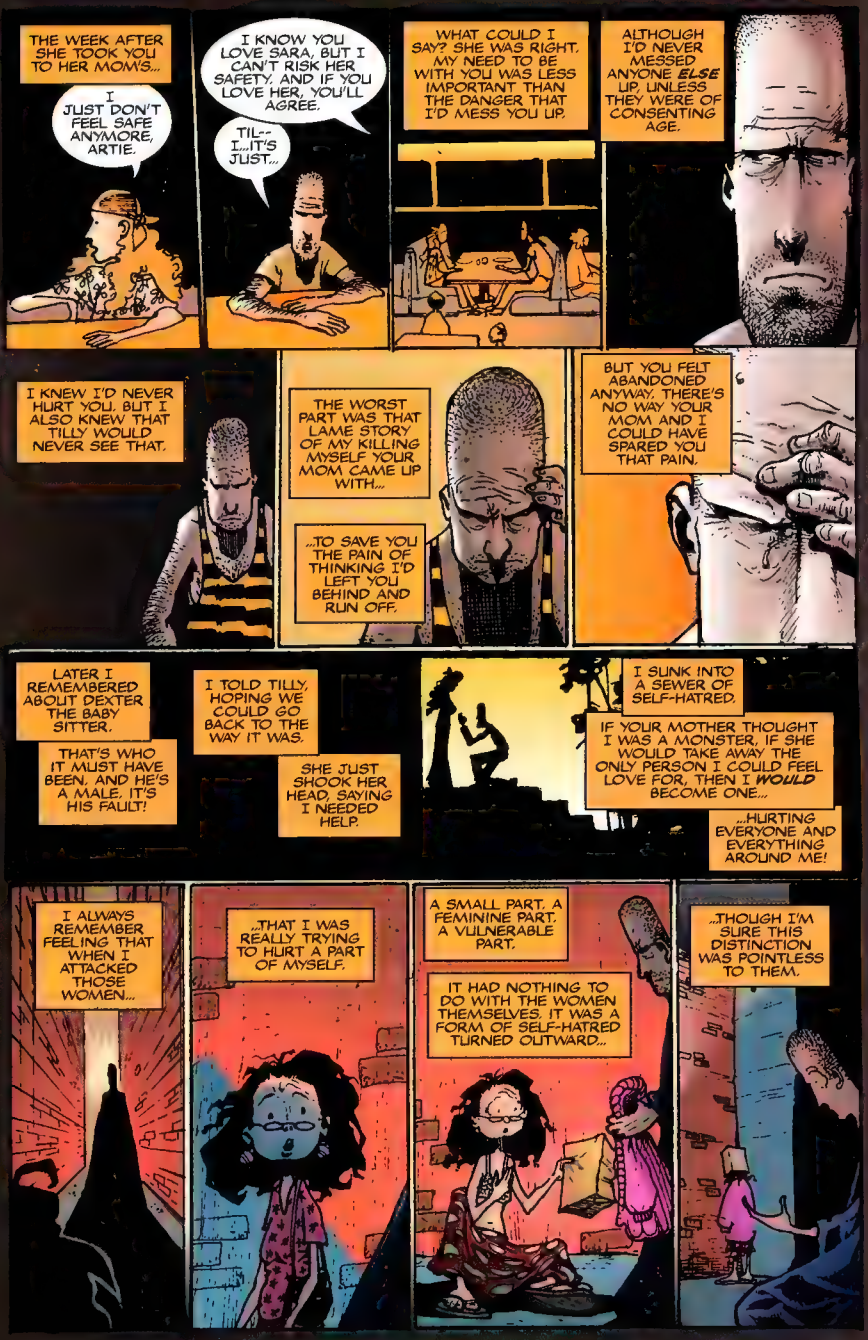

THINGS GOT UGLY. ONCE I CAUGHT JUDY DRINKING, AND SLAPPED HER AROUND.
SHE TOLD HER BROTHER AND HE CAME OVER AND BEAT THE CRAP OUT OF ME! HE ALSO BEAT HER UP FOR TELLING.
POP
CRUNK
THAT NIGHT JUDY HEARD ME TALKING IN MY SLEEP. WHATEVER I WAS SAYING WAS GIVING ME NIGHTMARES...
THE NEXT MORNING SHE TOLD ME...
YOU WERE TALKING IN YOUR SLEEP... YOU SAID--
I MUST'VE BLACKED OUT AT THOSE WORDS, BECAUSE...
...I AWOKE TWO DAYS LATER, IN THAT SAME SPOT!
JUDY HADN'T CALLED A DOCTOR OR ANYTHING!!
SHE JUST LEFT ME THERE LIKE THAT FOR TWO WHOLE DAYS.
AFTER THAT I KNEW I COULD NO LONGER TRUST JUDY. MAYBE IT WAS THE BOTTLE, OR MAYBE SHE WAS JUST SICK OF MY SH*T...
WHATEVER IT WAS, SHE'D FOUND A WEAK SPOT.
SHE'D COME AND STAND OVER ME WHENEVER I GOT SICK, CREEPING ME OUT.
AND SHE'D DRINK IN FRONT OF ME NOW! SHE DIDN'T CARE!
SHE WENT ALONG WITH MY GAMES...
BUT I COULD FEEL HER HATRED...
PUFF
...READY TO...
...BLOW.
ONE DAY SHE WHISPERED THAT SAME PHRASE...
...AND I AWOKE IN TRACTION.
WHEN I GOT HOME, JUDY HAD MOVED OUT FOR GOOD.

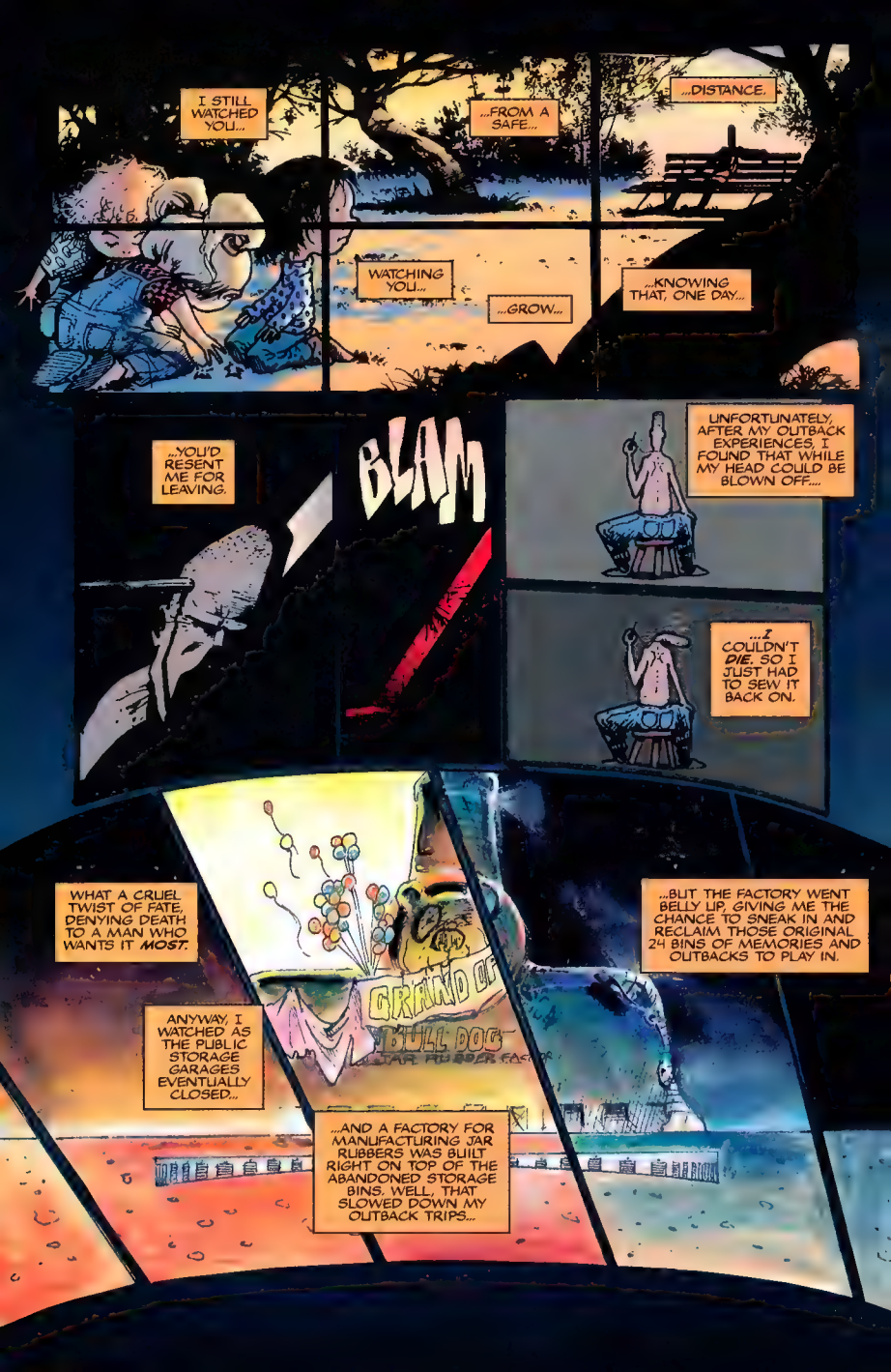

BY MY FORTIES I'D MOVED AWAY TO AUSTRALIA, TRYING TO FORGET WHAT I'D INFLICTED OR HAD BEEN INFLICTED ON ME BY VARIOUS WOMEN IN MY LIFE.
I BEFRIENDED SOME ABORIGINAL NATIVES WHO TOOK ME IN.
I WAS HORRIFIED TO FIND THAT A GROUP OF THE NATIVE CHILDREN THERE WERE VICTIMS OF ORGAN EXPERIMENTS, JUST LIKE PHRED.
I FELT A SPECIAL BOND WITH THESE CHILDREN WHO CLUSTERED AROUND ME, BLINDLY FEELING THEIR WAY.
I LIVED THERE FOR YEARS, LEARNING THEIR TRADITIONS, THOUGH I OFTEN FELT THEY WERE HUMORING ME.
FOR YEARS I TRIED TO MASTER THEIR MAGICAL ART OF "WALKING IN THE DREAMTIME" WITH NO SUCCESS.
UNFORTUNATELY, I HAD NO IDEA WHOSE IT WAS.
THEN, ONE DAY, I DID IT! I'D PENETRATED SOMEONE'S OUTBACK.
LATER I AWOKE ALONE, WITH NO SIGN OF THE TRIBE. UPON RETURNING TO TOWN, I WAS INFORMED THE PEOPLE I LIVED WITH DID NOT EXIST.

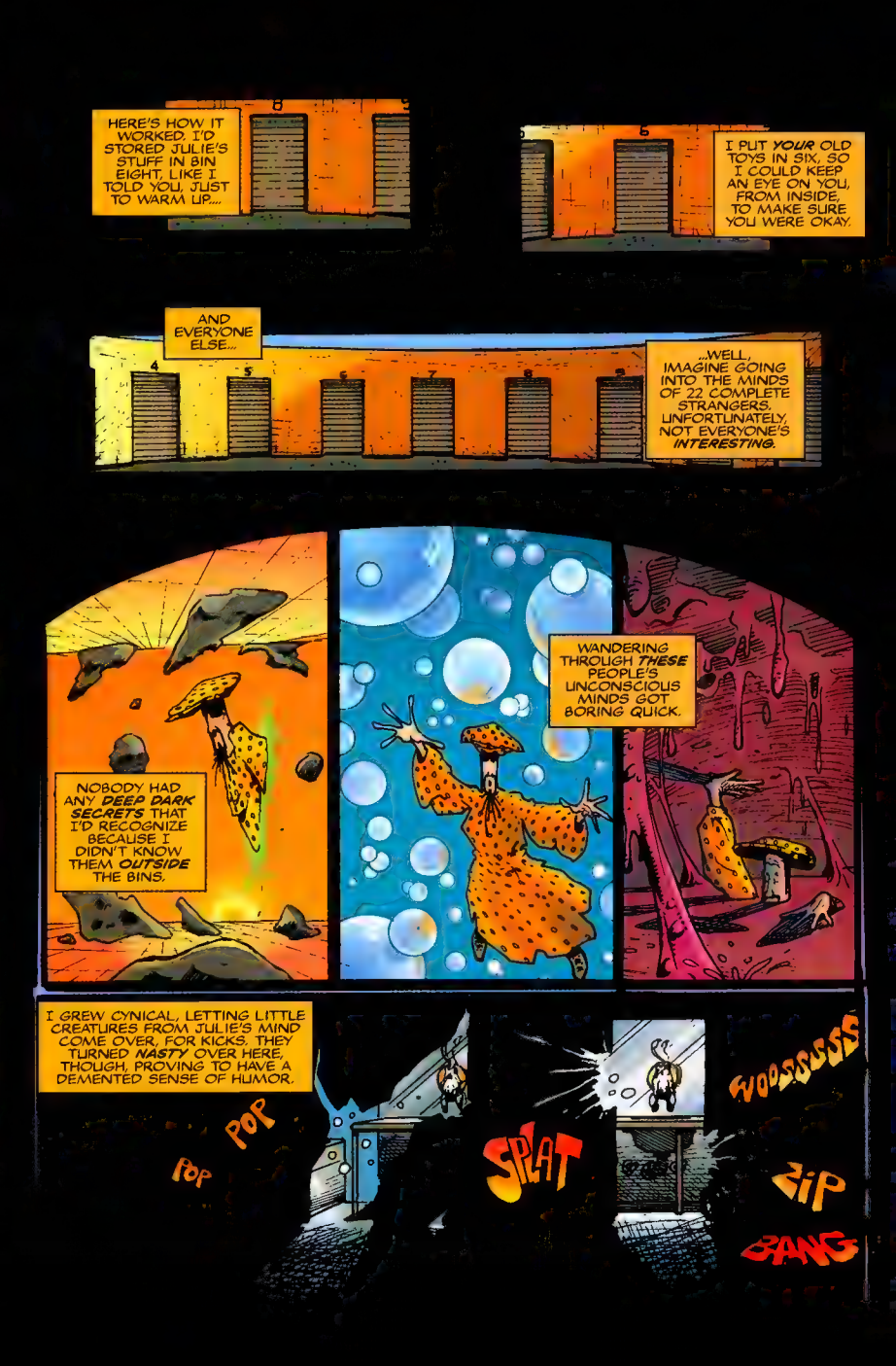

I RETURNED TO THE STATES TO VISIT AN OLD SCHOOL CHUM AND HIS WIFE.
THEY TOOK ME IN, AND I TOLD THEM OF MY TRAVELS, AND ADVENTURES...
...AS I ALSO TOLD THEIR LITTLE DAUGHTER, JULIE.
FOR I HADN'T JUST LEARNED TO WALK IN MINDS IN AUSTRALIA. NO, I HAD REALIZED, IN THAT MOMENT, THE ONE REASON I'VE BEEN ANGRY AND AFRAID OF WOMEN MY WHOLE LIFE--WHY I'D PUT UP WITH CELIA, AND WHY JUDY HAD PUT UP WITH ME, THE SICKNESS, THE PAPER BAGS, PARKAS, DEXTER, AUNT RUTH, EVERYTHING ALL CAME DOWN TO THIS ONE THING...
...BUT I FORGOT TO WRITE IT DOWN.
I REMEMBER IT HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH... ABUSE, THOUGH.
ANYWAY, THE ABORIGINES HAD POWER SPOTS! HERE THEY WERE PUBLIC STORAGE BINS! I FOUND A CIRCULAR GROUP OF 24 BINS TO EXPLORE. STRANGERS! "OUTBACKS".
I EVEN TALKED MY CHUM JOHN WINTERS INTO KEEPING HIS DAUGHTER'S OLD STUFF IN ONE. SHE'D GONE TO COLLEGE AND THEY NEEDED THE ROOM.
NOW, WITH JULIE'S STUFF STORED, I WOULDN'T BE LIMITED TO THE OUTBACKS OF 24 STRANGERS...
...I COULD WATCH SOMEONE I KNEW PERSONALLY, AS HER OUTBACK DEVELOPED.
I THOUGHT THIS STUFF WOULD MAKE ME FEEL CLOSER TO YOU!
INSTEAD I JUST FEEL SICK KNOWING ABOUT ALL THE ABUSE YOU SUFFERED THROUGH AND GAVE OUT! IT JUSTIFIES NOTHING...
I MEAN JEEZ! IS THERE ANYBODY WHO ISN'T USING THE "I WAS ABUSED AS A CHILD, AND THAT'S WHY I DID IT" DEFENSE? GIMME A BREAK.

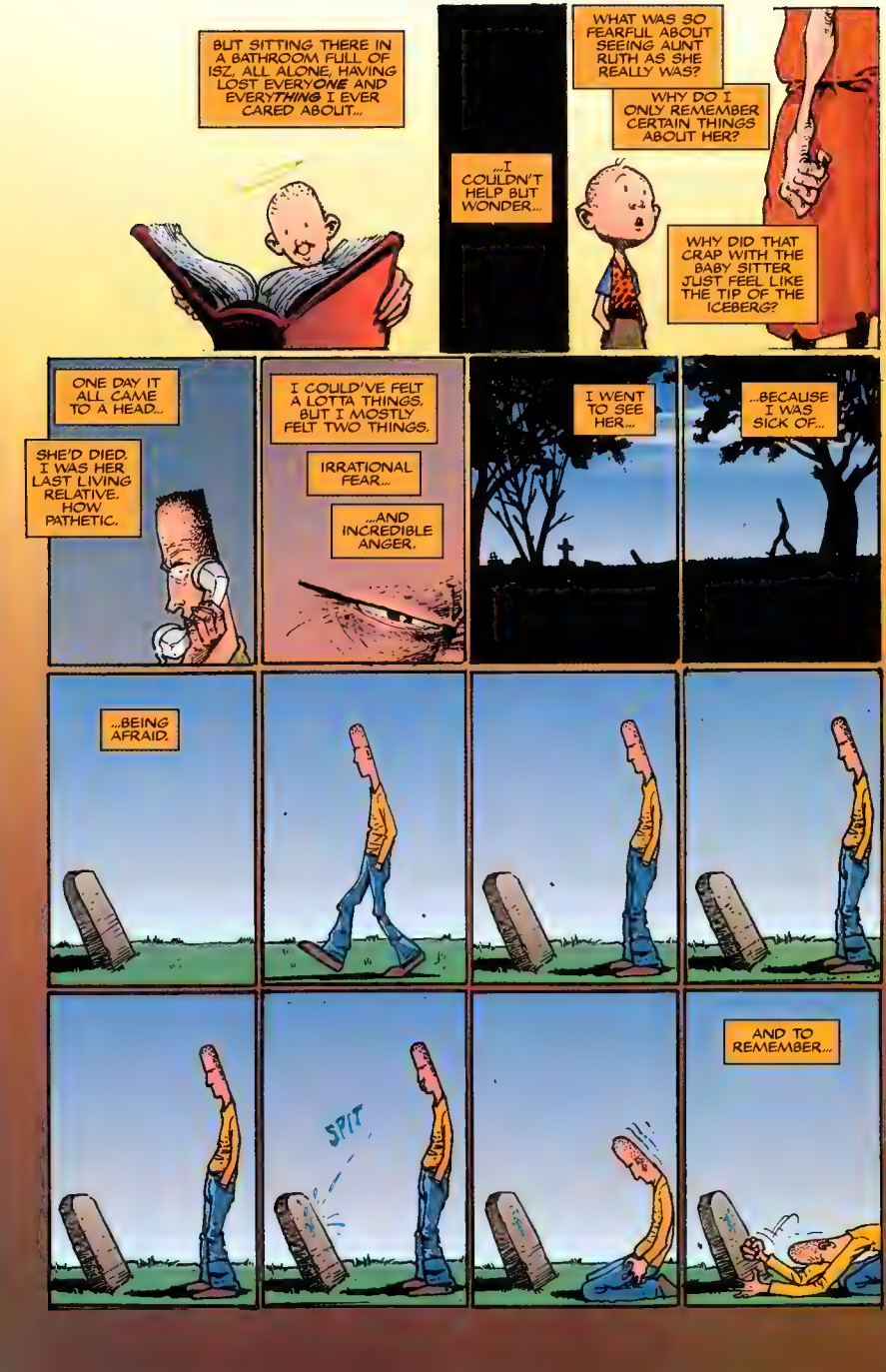

3RD WIFE
BY FIFTY YEARS OLD YOU'D THINK I'D'VE LEARNED, HUH? THE THIRD MISTAKE WAS A BLESSING IN DISGUISE, BECAUSE IT GAVE US YOU.
WAR
TILLY JONES WAS 17 IN 1971. I DON'T KNOW WHAT SHE SAW IN ME. SHE SAID MY OLD-FASHIONED-NESS WAS CUTE.
AND SHE BROUGHT OUT EVERYTHING THAT WASN'T.
BUT I PUSHED ALL THAT DOWN.
SOON YOU CAME ALONG!
IT WAS LIKE HOPE ALL OVER AGAIN. THIS WAS MY SECOND CHANCE. AND I LOVED YOU, MORE THAN WORDS... LITTLE SARA.
I KNEW I STILL HAD A RESERVOIR OF ANGER, LURKING...
HENDRIX
...BUT I HID IT.
ONCE I AWOKE FROM A NIGHTMARE ABOUT HURTING YOU, LIKE CELIA HAD DONE TO PHRED!
I'D NEVER HURT ANY KIDS BEFORE, BUT I COULDN'T TAKE THE CHANCE...
TILLY STOPPED ME, WANTING TO KNOW WHY? WHY?!
THE CLOSER I GOT TO TILLY EMOTIONALLY, THE MORE I'D SPACE OUT IN BED AND JUST SEE...
...PATTERNS.
I TRIED TO ABUSE HER, LIKE JUDY, BUT SHE WOULDN'T PUT UP WITH IT.
THEN I TRIED TO GET HER TO ABUSE ME. BUT SHE DIDN'T UNDERSTAND WHY SOMEONE MUST BE HURT TO RECEIVE LOVE.
AND WHEN I TRIED TO EXPLAIN...
...I THREW UP.

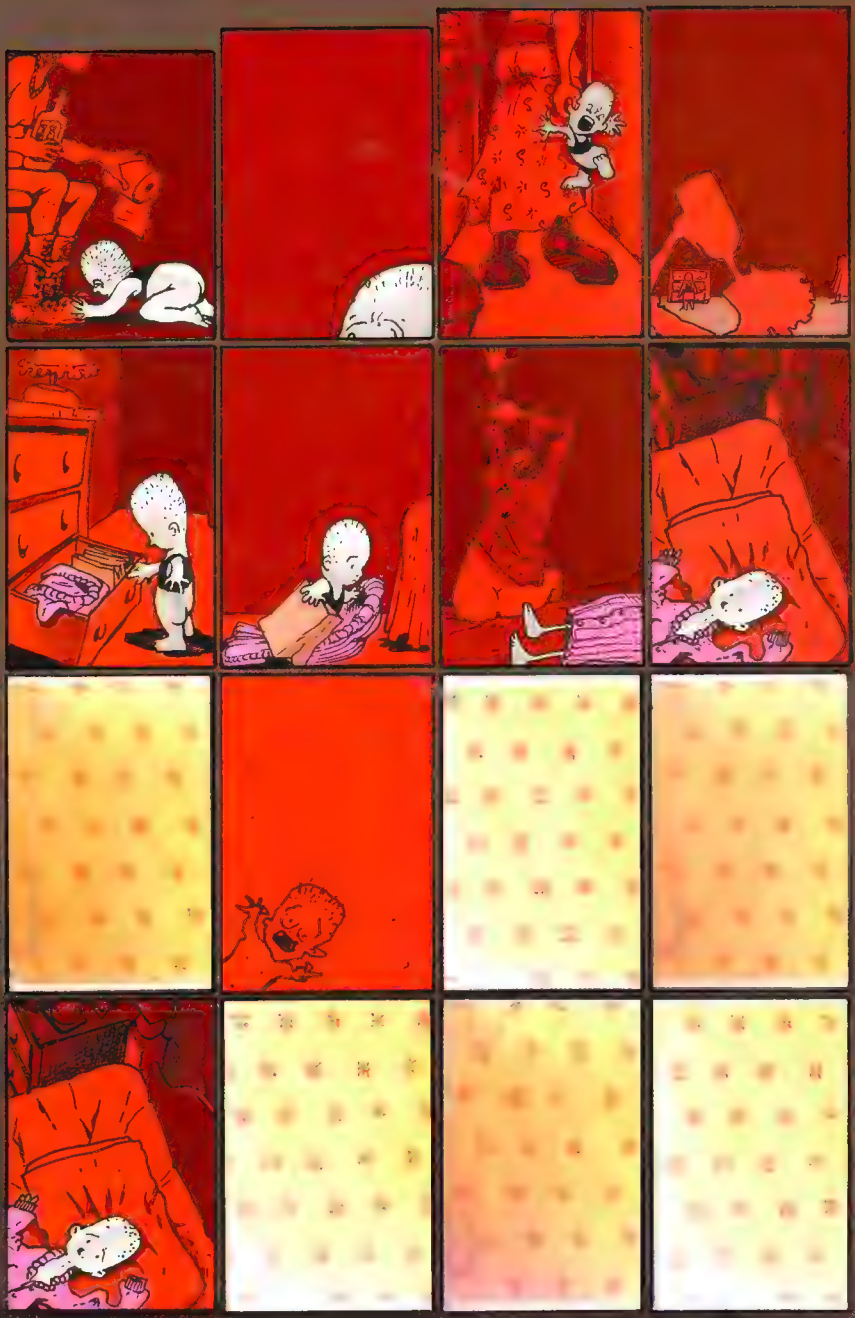

I BROKE DOWN AND TOLD HER ALL ABOUT CELIA AND JUDY...
...THAT I HAD DUMPED ALL OF MY ANGER FROM WIFE #1 ONTO WIFE #2, AND I COULD ONLY PERFORM WITH "PROPS".
AFTER MAKING HER SWEAR NOT TO LAUGH, I SHOWED HER MY BAG AND PARKA.
SHE SAID
I BET I CAN MAKE YOU FORGET THAT BAG FOR GOOD.
I WANTED TO CRY. NEVER HAD ANYONE TRIED SO HARD...
BUT I JUST COULDN'T HELP IT. FOR HER SAKE, I ACTED EXCITED, BUT INSIDE I CRINGED AND WANTED TO DIE.
MY ONE SOLACE WAS YOU. UNTOUCHED AND UNSPOILED, AS I ONCE WAS. REMEMBER HOW I USED TO GIVE YOU A RIDE ON MY BACK, LIKE A PONY?
IN THE QUIET OF THE NIGHT, TILLY SAID
YOU ACT LIKE YOU WERE ABUSED.
I DIDN'T KNOW.
I TOLD HER ABOUT MY LIVING ALONE WITH MY AUNT, BUT SHE SAID THAT WOMEN ALMOST NEVER ABUSE MEN. IT MUST BE SOMEONE ELSE.
TEARS STARTED TO STREAM DOWN MY FACE, BUT I DIDN'T KNOW WHY. SHE ASKED
IF YOU KEEP DUMPING ANGER ON EACH NEW WOMAN, WHO DUMPED IT ON *YOU* IN THE *FIRST* PLACE?
I TRIED TO... REMEMBER...
...ONLY GLIMPSES...
THEN I TOLD TILLY ABOUT MY NIGHTMARE OF ABUSING YOU. I THOUGHT IT WAS IMPORTANT TO SHARE.
BIG MISTAKE.
SHE GOT REAL QUIET. SHE NEVER LOOKED AT ME THE SAME AFTER THAT.
IN HER MIND, I WAS CAPABLE OF INFLICTING THE ABUSE I MIGHT HAVE SUFFERED! IT WAS THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

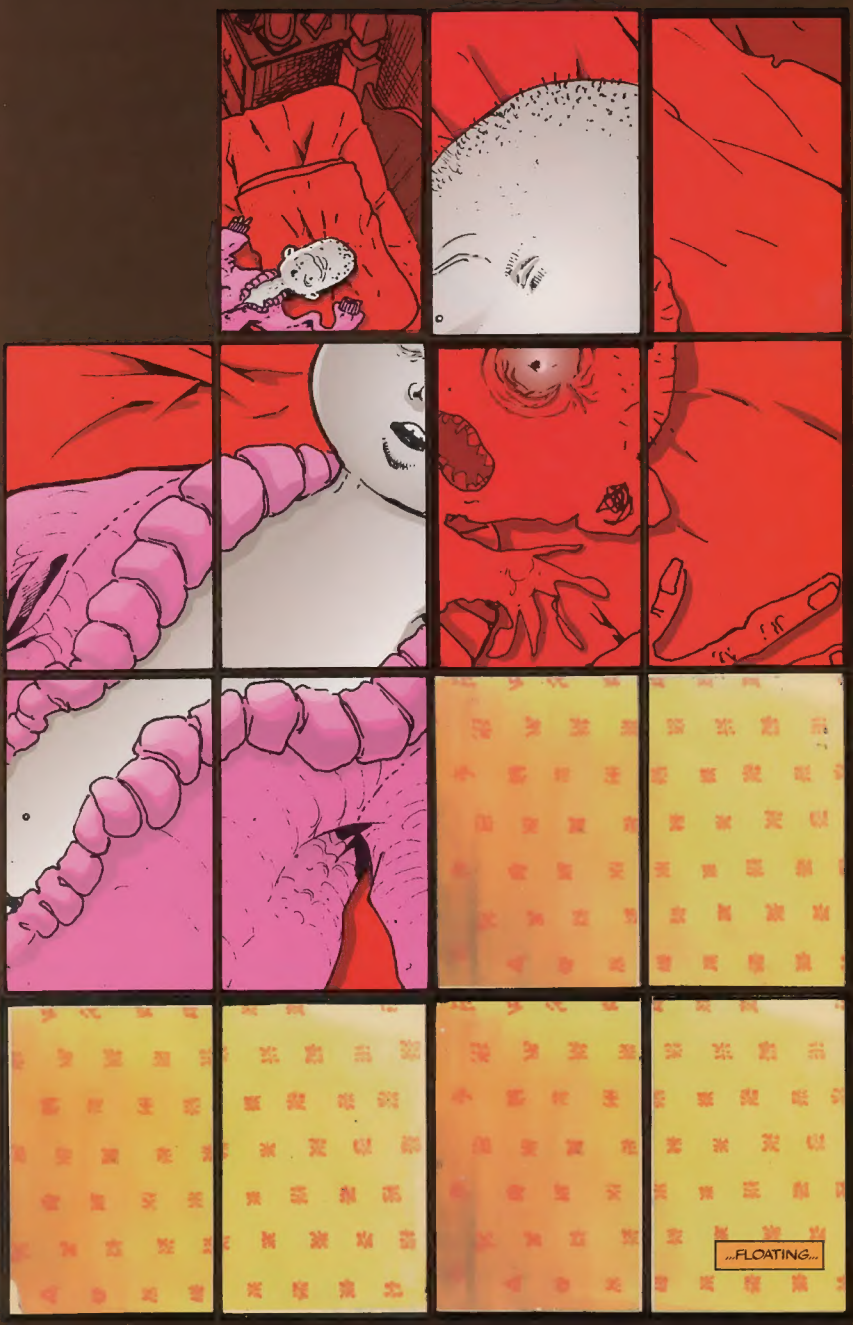

THE WEEK AFTER SHE TOOK YOU TO HER MOM'S...
I JUST DON'T FEEL SAFE ANYMORE, ARTIE.
I KNOW YOU LOVE SARA, BUT I CAN'T RISK HER SAFETY. AND IF YOU LOVE HER, YOU'LL AGREE.
TIL-- I...IT'S JUST...
WHAT COULD I SAY? SHE WAS RIGHT. MY NEED TO BE WITH YOU WAS LESS IMPORTANT THAN THE DANGER THAT I'D MESS YOU UP.
ALTHOUGH I'D NEVER MESSED ANYONE ELSE UP, UNLESS THEY WERE OF CONSENTING AGE.
I KNEW I'D NEVER HURT YOU. BUT I ALSO KNEW THAT TILLY WOULD NEVER SEE THAT.
THE WORST PART WAS THAT LAME STORY OF MY KILLING MYSELF YOUR MOM CAME UP WITH...
...TO SAVE YOU THE PAIN OF THINKING I'D LEFT YOU BEHIND AND RUN OFF.
BUT YOU FELT ABANDONED ANYWAY. THERE'S NO WAY YOUR MOM AND I COULD HAVE SPARED YOU THAT PAIN.
LATER I REMEMBERED ABOUT DEXTER THE BABY SITTER.
THAT'S WHO IT MUST HAVE BEEN. AND HE'S A MALE. IT'S HIS FAULT!
I TOLD TILLY, HOPING WE COULD GO BACK TO THE WAY IT WAS.
SHE JUST SHOOK HER HEAD, SAYING I NEEDED HELP.
I SUNK INTO A SEWER OF SELF-HATRED.
IF YOUR MOTHER THOUGHT I WAS A MONSTER, IF SHE WOULD TAKE AWAY THE ONLY PERSON I COULD FEEL LOVE FOR, THEN I WOULD BECOME ONE...
...HURTING EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING AROUND ME!
I ALWAYS REMEMBER FEELING THAT WHEN I ATTACKED THOSE WOMEN...
...THAT I WAS REALLY TRYING TO HURT A PART OF MYSELF.
A SMALL PART. A FEMININE PART. A VULNERABLE PART.
IT HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THE WOMEN THEMSELVES. IT WAS A FORM OF SELF-HATRED TURNED OUTWARD...
...THOUGH I'M SURE THIS DISTINCTION WAS POINTLESS TO THEM.

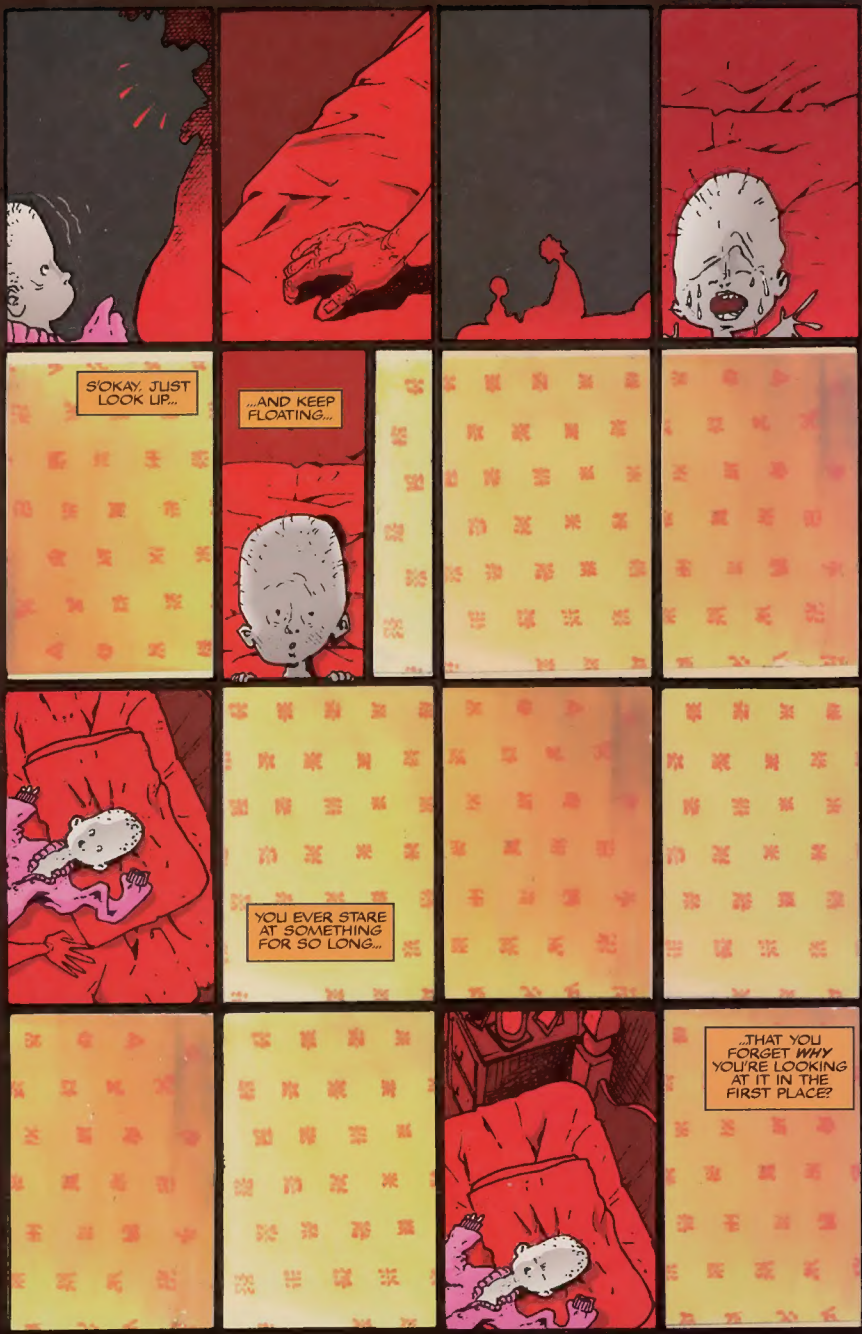

I STILL WATCHED YOU...
...FROM A SAFE...
...DISTANCE.
WATCHING YOU...
...GROW...
...KNOWING THAT, ONE DAY...
...YOU'D RESENT ME FOR LEAVING.
BLAM
UNFORTUNATELY, AFTER MY OUTBACK EXPERIENCES, I FOUND THAT WHILE MY HEAD COULD BE BLOWN OFF...
...I COULDN'T *DIE*. SO I JUST HAD TO SEW IT BACK ON.
WHAT A CRUEL TWIST OF FATE, DENYING DEATH TO A MAN WHO WANTS IT *MOST*.
ANYWAY, I WATCHED AS THE PUBLIC STORAGE GARAGES EVENTUALLY CLOSED...
...AND A FACTORY FOR MANUFACTURING JAR RUBBERS WAS BUILT RIGHT ON TOP OF THE ABANDONED STORAGE BINS. WELL, THAT SLOWED DOWN MY OUTBACK TRIPS...
...BUT THE FACTORY WENT BELLY UP, GIVING ME THE CHANCE TO SNEAK IN AND RECLAIM THOSE ORIGINAL 24 BINS OF MEMORIES AND OUTBACKS TO PLAY IN.

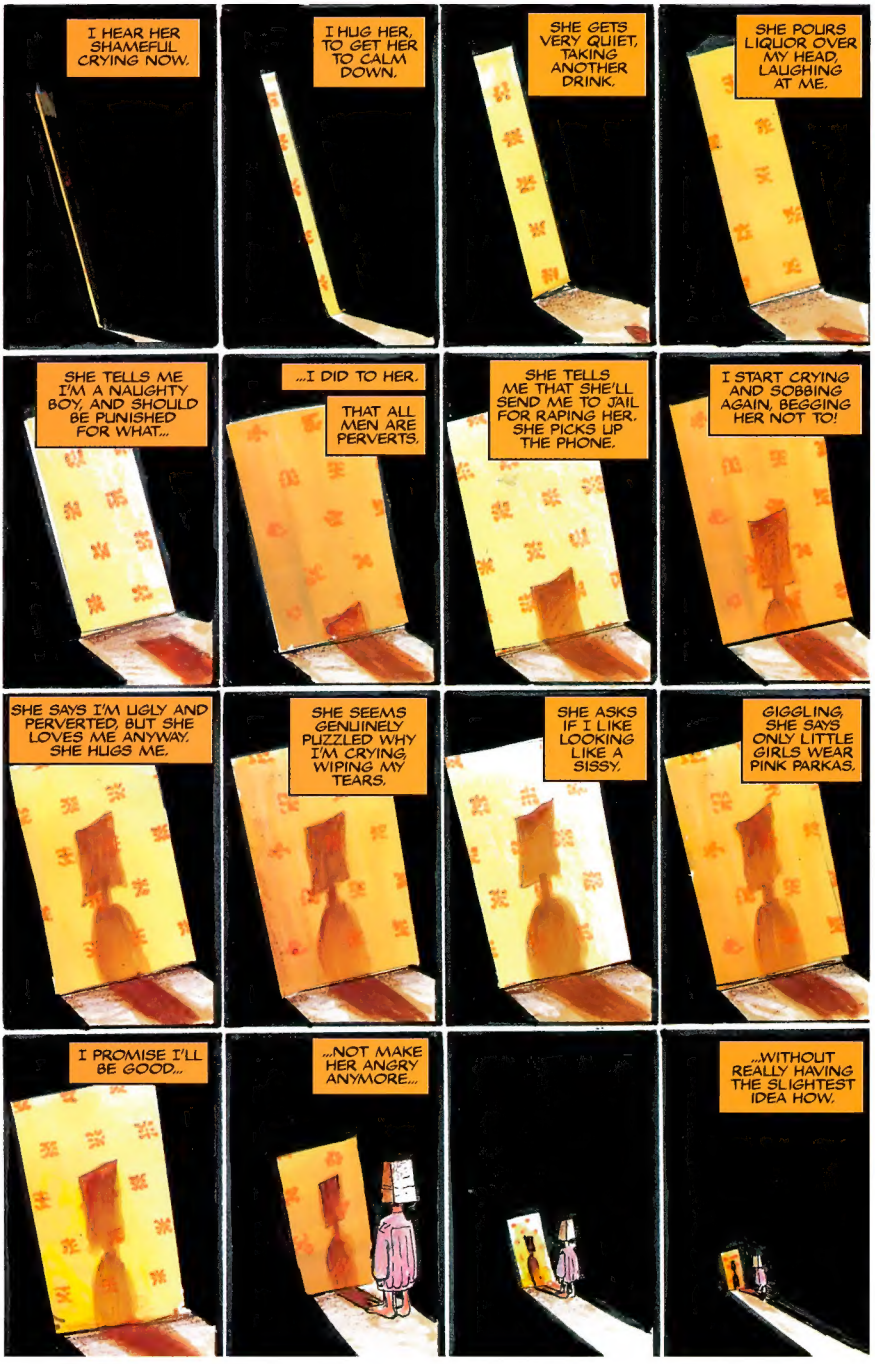

HERE'S HOW IT WORKED. I'D STORED JULIE'S STUFF IN BIN EIGHT, LIKE I TOLD YOU, JUST TO WARM UP....
I PUT YOUR OLD TOYS IN SIX, SO I COULD KEEP AN EYE ON YOU, FROM INSIDE, TO MAKE SURE YOU WERE OKAY.
AND EVERYONE ELSE...
...WELL, IMAGINE GOING INTO THE MINDS OF 22 COMPLETE STRANGERS. UNFORTUNATELY, NOT EVERYONE'S INTERESTING.
NOBODY HAD ANY DEEP DARK SECRETS THAT I'D RECOGNIZE BECAUSE I DIDN'T KNOW THEM OUTSIDE THE BINS.
WANDERING THROUGH THESE PEOPLE'S UNCONSCIOUS MINDS GOT BORING QUICK.
I GREW CYNICAL, LETTING LITTLE CREATURES FROM JULIE'S MIND COME OVER, FOR KICKS. THEY TURNED NASTY OVER HERE, THOUGH, PROVING TO HAVE A DEMENTED SENSE OF HUMOR.
POP
POP
SPLAT
WOOSHHH
ZIP
BANG

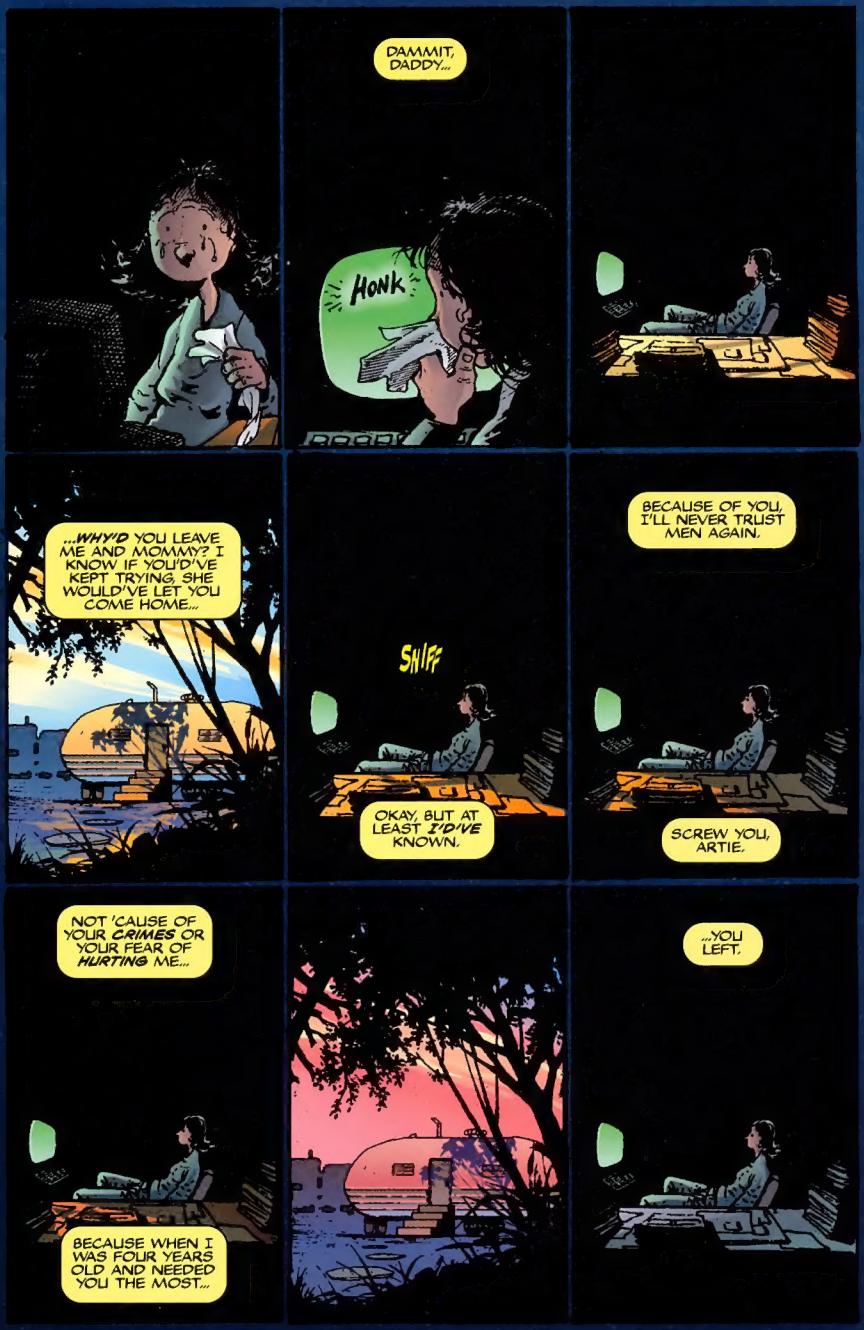

BUT SITTING THERE IN A BATHROOM FULL OF ISZ, ALL ALONE, HAVING LOST EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING I EVER CARED ABOUT...
...I COULDN'T HELP BUT WONDER...
WHAT WAS SO FEARFUL ABOUT SEEING AUNT RUTH AS SHE REALLY WAS?
WHY DO I ONLY REMEMBER CERTAIN THINGS ABOUT HER?
WHY DID THAT CRAP WITH THE BABY SITTER JUST FEEL LIKE THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG?
ONE DAY IT ALL CAME TO A HEAD...
SHE'D DIED. I WAS HER LAST LIVING RELATIVE. HOW PATHETIC.
I COULD'VE FELT A LOTTA THINGS. BUT I MOSTLY FELT TWO THINGS.
IRRATIONAL FEAR...
...AND INCREDIBLE ANGER.
I WENT TO SEE HER...
...BECAUSE I WAS SICK OF...
...BEING AFRAID.
SPIT
AND TO REMEMBER...




...FLOATING...


S'OKAY. JUST LOOK UP...
...AND KEEP FLOATING...
YOU EVER STARE AT SOMETHING FOR SO LONG...
...THAT YOU FORGET *WHY* YOU'RE LOOKING AT IT IN THE FIRST PLACE?


I HEAR HER SHAMEFUL CRYING NOW.
I HUG HER, TO GET HER TO CALM DOWN.
SHE GETS VERY QUIET, TAKING ANOTHER DRINK.
SHE POURS LIQUOR OVER MY HEAD, LAUGHING AT ME.
SHE TELLS ME I'M A NAUGHTY BOY, AND SHOULD BE PUNISHED FOR WHAT...
...I DID TO HER.
THAT ALL MEN ARE PERVERTS.
SHE TELLS ME THAT SHE'LL SEND ME TO JAIL FOR RAPING HER. SHE PICKS UP THE PHONE.
I START CRYING AND SOBBING AGAIN, BEGGING HER NOT TO!
SHE SAYS I'M UGLY AND PERVERTED, BUT SHE LOVES ME ANYWAY. SHE HUGS ME.
SHE SEEMS GENUINELY PUZZLED WHY I'M CRYING, WIPING MY TEARS.
SHE ASKS IF I LIKE LOOKING LIKE A SISSY.
GIGGLING, SHE SAYS ONLY LITTLE GIRLS WEAR PINK PARKAS.
I PROMISE I'LL BE GOOD...
...NOT MAKE HER ANGRY ANYMORE...
...WITHOUT REALLY HAVING THE SLIGHTEST IDEA HOW.


DAMMIT, DADDY...
HONK
...WHY'D YOU LEAVE ME AND MOMMY? I KNOW IF YOU'D'VE KEPT TRYING, SHE WOULD'VE LET YOU COME HOME...
SNIFF
OKAY, BUT AT LEAST I'D'VE KNOWN.
BECAUSE OF YOU, I'LL NEVER TRUST MEN AGAIN.
SCREW YOU, ARTIE.
NOT 'CAUSE OF YOUR CRIMES OR YOUR FEAR OF HURTING ME...
BECAUSE WHEN I WAS FOUR YEARS OLD AND NEEDED YOU THE MOST...
...YOU LEFT.